



**Northern Ireland  
Review of Public Administration**

**RESEARCH BULLETIN 2  
RESULTS FROM FEBRUARY NORTHERN IRELAND OMNIBUS SURVEY**  
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**GENERAL**

This bulletin is based on information obtained from the Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey, which was carried out over a 5-week period in February and March 2003 by the Central Survey Unit of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). In all, a total of 1,214 people were surveyed.

The Review of Public Administration team commissioned a series of questions to be included in this Survey, on the public's views and experience of public services in Northern Ireland (see Notes).

**KEY POINTS**

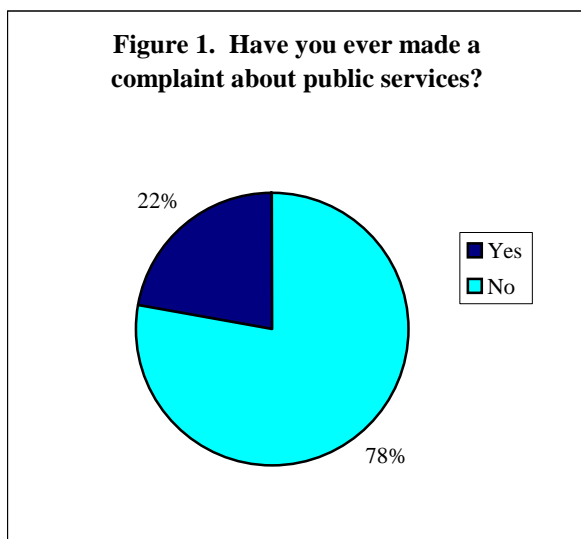
- Twenty-two percent of respondents had made a complaint about public services at some time.
- Thirty-five percent of respondents stated that they had wanted to make a complaint about public services but had not, with the majority (57%) stating that they felt there was no point in complaining, as nothing would be done anyway.
- Of those respondents who had made a complaint, the services most complained about were council services (34%), roads (22%), public transport (11%), health (10%) and education (5%). Most complaints (73%) were about quality of service.
- The majority of respondents who had made a complaint about public services (56%) were dissatisfied with how their complaint was dealt with.
- The majority of respondents (69%) agreed that councils were best placed to provide services because councillors were directly accountable to local people. The majority (88%) also agreed that it was important that there was a local council to provide services in their area.
- Of those respondents who had had contact with their local council, the majority (82%) stated that this contact was either useful or very useful.
- The majority of respondents (69%) would be most likely to use the telephone to contact a provider of public services, rather than by letter, in person or by email.
- Half of all respondents would prefer, if given the choice, to have one telephone number by which to access public services and information about services.

## 1. Complaints

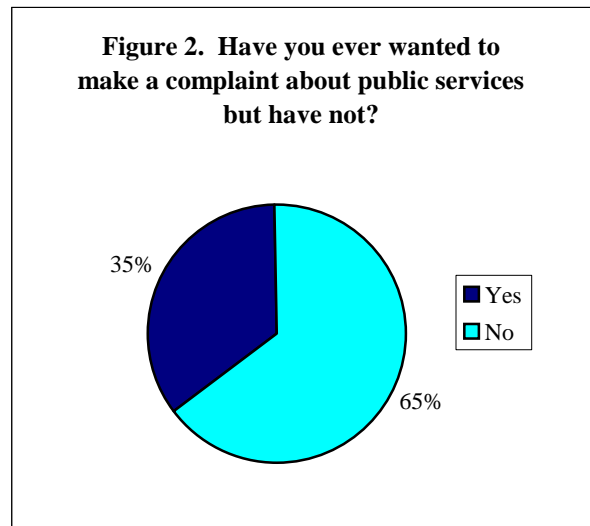
Respondents were asked a number of questions relating to complaints about public services. They were asked if they had ever made a complaint about public services, and if so what service they complained about.

22% of respondents had made a complaint about public services at some time (Figure 1). There were differences among respondents in their answers to this question in terms of age and socio-economic group.

People aged 35 and over were significantly <sup>(1)</sup> more likely to have made a complaint about public services compared with people aged under 35. Also, people working in non-manual occupations were more likely to have made a complaint than those working in other occupations.



Respondents were asked if they had ever wanted to make a complaint about public services but had not done so (Figure 2). There was a difference across age groups in responses to this question. More people aged 35 and over had wanted to complain but had not, compared with those aged under 35.



Respondents who had complained were asked which service they had complained about (Table 1).

**Table 1. What service did you complain about?**

	Number	%
Council services	90	34%
Roads	58	22%
Public transport	30	11%
Health	26	10%
Education	13	5%
Housing	9	3%
Planning	8	3%
Post office	8	3%
Water service	8	3%
Other	15	6%
Total	265	100%

Most respondents had complained about council services, roads, public transport, health and education.

There were differences in responses to this question across different age groups, and between respondents living in urban and rural areas.

Respondents aged 35 and over were more likely to have complained about roads and council services than people aged under 35. Respondents living in urban areas were more likely to have complained about council services and public transport, whereas respondents living in rural areas were more likely to have complained about roads.

Respondents were asked about the general nature of their complaint (Table 2).

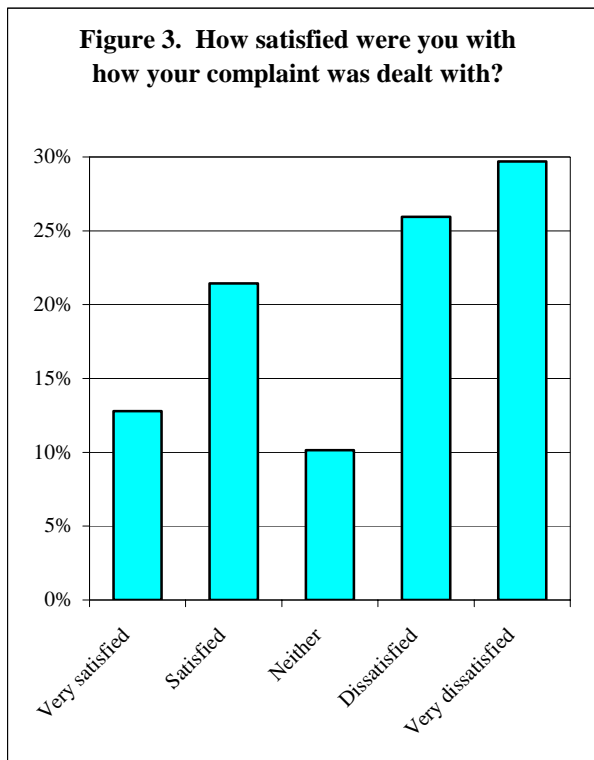
(1) See Notes point 8

**Table 2. What was the nature of your complaint?**

	N	%
Quality of service	190	73%
Timeliness	23	9%
Fairness	17	7%
Health & safety	8	3%
Lack of facilities	7	3%
Staff attitude/behaviour	6	2%
Other	8	3%
Total	259	100%

These views are reflected across the sample irrespective of religion, gender, socio-economic group or area of residence.

Respondents were asked how satisfied or dissatisfied they were about how their complaint was dealt with (Figure 3). The majority of respondents (56%) were dissatisfied with how their complaint was dealt with. These views are reflected across the sample irrespective of religion, gender, socio-economic group or area of residence.



If respondents answered yes to the previous question, they were also asked what had prevented them from making a complaint (Table 3).

**Table 3. Respondents reasons for not complaining**

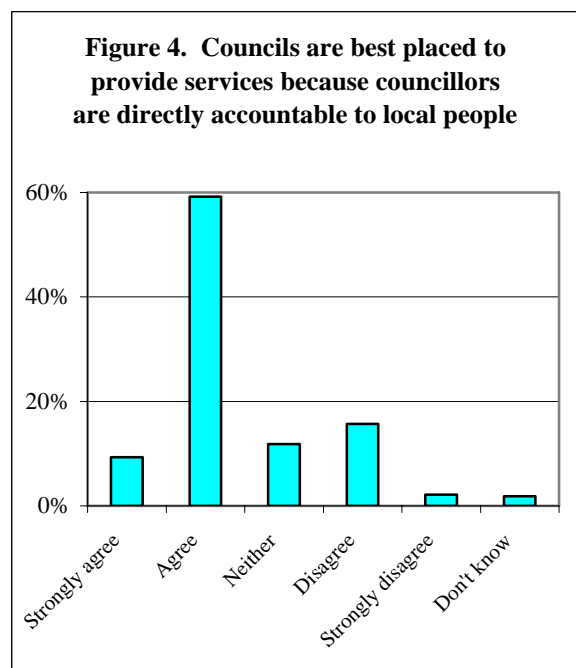
	N.	%
No point in complaining as nothing would be done anyway	236	57%
Don't know who to complain to	63	15%
Complaints procedure too complicated	57	14%
Apathy	41	10%
Takes too long	6	1%
To avoid confrontation	6	1%
Other	7	2%
Total	417	100%

The majority of respondents (57%) stated that they had not complained because there was no point, as nothing would be done anyway. These views are reflected across the sample irrespective of religion, gender, socio-economic group or area of residence.

**2. Accountability**

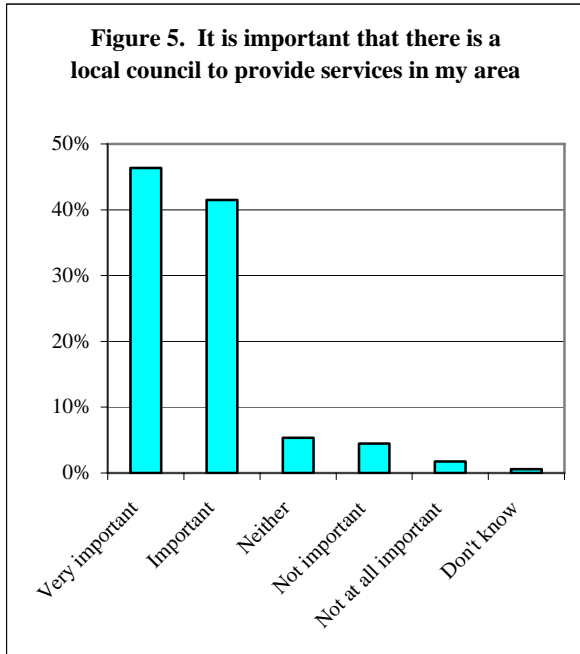
Respondents were asked if they agreed or disagreed that councils were best placed to provide services because councillors were directly accountable to local people (Figure 4).

The majority of respondents (69%) agreed with this statement, although there was a difference in responses to this question according to different age groups. People aged 35 and over were more likely to agree with this statement compared with people aged under 35.



### 3. Importance of local councils

Respondents were asked how important or otherwise it was for them that there was a local council to provide services in their area (Figure 5).

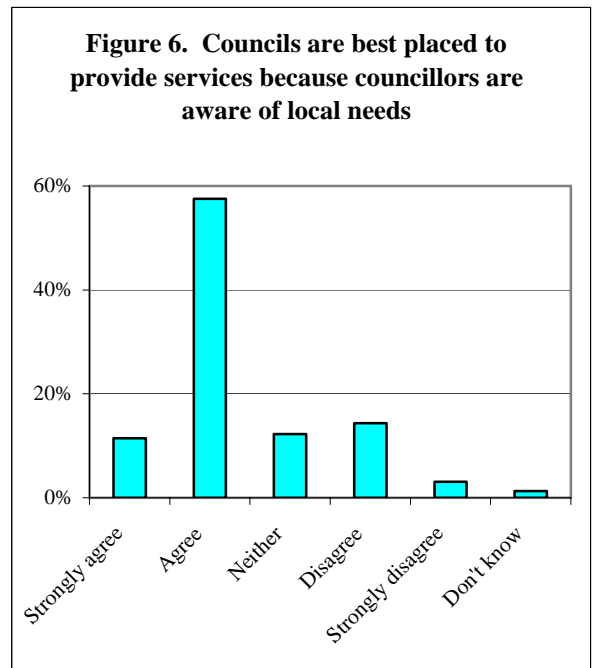


The majority of respondents (88%) agreed with this statement, although there was a difference in responses to this question among different age groups. People aged 35 and over were more likely to agree or with this statement compared with people aged under 35.

### 4. Awareness of local needs

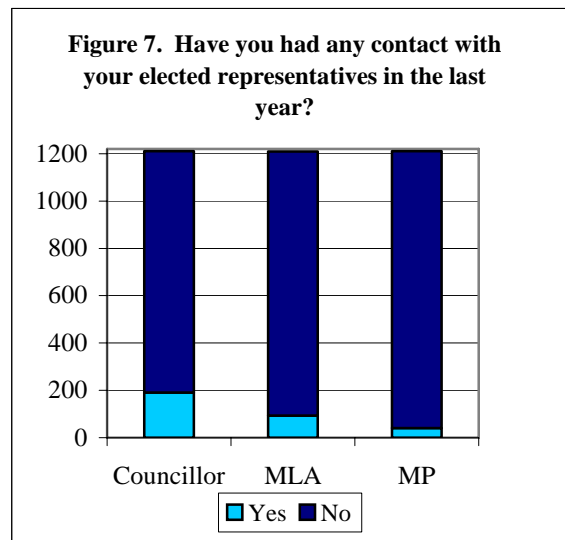
Respondents were asked if they agreed or disagreed that councils were best placed to provide services because councillors were aware of local needs (Figure 6).

The majority of respondents (69%) agreed with this statement, although there was a difference in responses among people of different age groups. People aged 35 and over were more likely to agree with this statement compared with people aged under 35.



### 5. Contact with elected representatives

Respondents were asked if they had had any contact with their elected representatives in the last year (Figure 7).



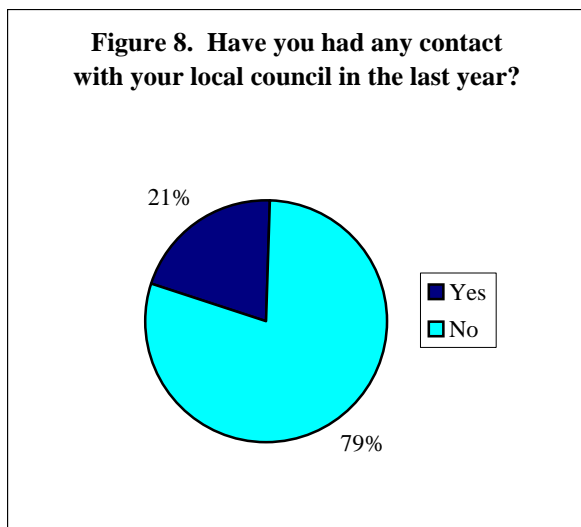
Sixteen percent of respondents had had contact with their councillor, 8% with their MLA and 3% with their MP. Significantly more men had had contact with their local councillor in the previous year compared with women.

## 6. Council area of residence

Almost all respondents (99.9%) correctly named the council area they lived in.

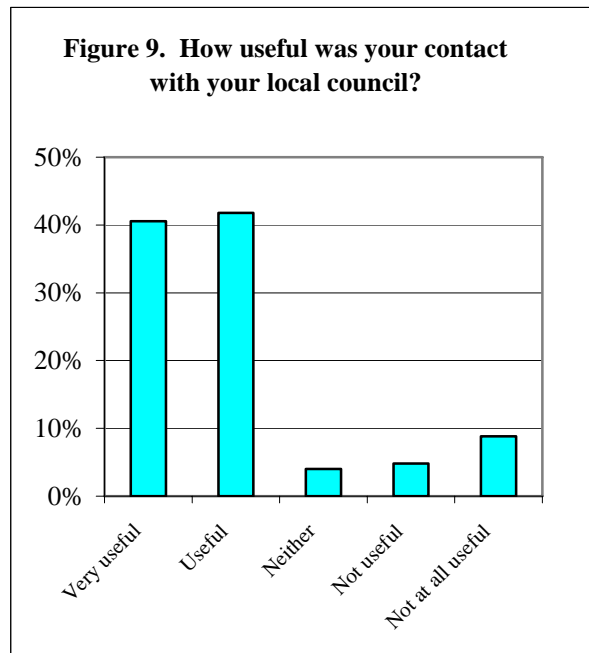
## 7. Contact with local council

Respondents were asked if they had had any contact with their local council at any time for reasons other than to make a complaint in the past year (Figure 8), and if so how useful had this contact been. Relatively few respondents (21%) had had any contact with their local council in the last year.



There are differences in responses to this question across the sample in terms of age and socio-economic group. People aged 35 and over were more likely to have had contact with their local council, as were people working in non-manual occupations compared with those working in skilled manual, semi-skilled manual and unskilled occupations.

Of those respondents who had had contact with their local council, the majority (82%) stated that this contact was useful (Figure 9). These views are reflected across the sample irrespective of religion, gender, socio-economic group or area of residence.



## 8. Method of contacting providers of public services

Respondents were asked, if they were to contact a provider of public services, what method they would be most likely to use (Table 4).

**Table 4. Most likely used method to contact provider of public services**

	Number	%
By telephone	831	69%
By letter	197	16%
In person	100	8%
By e-mail	44	4%
Via elected representative	14	1%
Through a website	13	1%
Don't Know	7	1%
Total	1205	100%

The majority of respondents stated that they would be most likely to use the telephone to contact a provider of public services. These views are reflected across the sample irrespective of religion, gender, socio-economic group or area of residence.

## 9. Preferred method of accessing services

Respondents were asked to rank their preferred options to use, if they had a choice, to access services and information about public services (Table 5).

**Table 5. Respondent's preferred method of accessing public services**

	1st	2nd	3rd
One physical location (i.e. one stop shop)	29%	46%	23%
One phone number	50%	37%	11%
One website	20%	15%	62%

Half of all respondents (50%) stated that their first preference would be to have one telephone number to access services and information about services. One physical location (a one-stop shop) was ranked second overall, and one website was ranked third in order of preference.

There was a difference in the ranking of these options among different age groups, between men and women and among different socio-economic groups. For example, in relation to the preferred use of one website, fewer people aged 50 and over ranked this as their first preference.

More men than women would prefer to have one website to access services and information.

More people working in non-manual occupations (i.e. professional, managerial and skilled non-manual occupations) would prefer to have one website to access public services, compared with those working in skilled manual, semi-skilled manual and unskilled occupations.

## Notes

1. The Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey is conducted several times each year by the Central Survey Unit of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), and is designed to provide a snapshot of the behaviour, lifestyle and views of a representative sample of the people of Northern Ireland.
2. The Survey comprises two distinct parts: core questions about the respondents and their individual circumstances, and a variety of mainly attitudinal questions commissioned by clients. Fifteen questions commissioned by the Review of Public Administration team were included in the February and March 2003 Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey. The questions asked were:
  - A. Which of the following options would you prefer to use, if you had the choice, to access services and information about public services? (Rank 1 – first preference; 2 – second preference; 3 – third preference)
    1. One physical location (e.g. a one-stop shop)
    2. One phone number
    3. One website
  - B. Which council area do you live in? (“Don’t know” is an option)
  - C. Over the last year, have you had any contact with your elected representatives?  
Councillors - Yes/no  
Assembly members (MLAs) – Yes/no  
Member of Parliament – Yes/no
  - D. If you were to contact a provider of public services, such as the Health Board, the Education and Library Board or your District Council, what method would you like to use? (Record one method only)
    - By letter
    - In person
    - By e-mail
    - By telephone
    - Through a website
    - Via elected representative (specify; councillor, MLA, etc.)
    - Other (specify).
  - E. Have you ever made a complaint about a public service? Yes/no
  - F. If yes, thinking about the last time that you complained, what service did you complain about?
  - G. If yes, what was the nature of the complaint?
  - H. If yes, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you about how your complaint was dealt with?  
Very satisfied  
Satisfied  
Neither  
Dissatisfied  
Very dissatisfied  
Don’t know
  - I. Have you ever wanted to make a complaint about public services but have not? Yes/no
  - J. If yes, what has prevented you from making a complaint?
  - K. Have you had contact with your local council at any time for any reason in the last year (apart from making a complaint)?
  - L. If so, how useful was this contact?  
Very useful  
Useful  
Neither  
Not useful

Not at all useful

Don't know

- M. Do you agree or disagree that councils are best placed to provide services because councillors are aware of local needs?

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know

- N. Do agree or disagree that councils are best placed to provide services because councillors are directly accountable to local people?

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know

- O. How important is it to you that there is a local council to provide services in your area?

Very important

Important

Neither

Not important

Not at all important

Don't know

3. The sample of those surveyed in the September 2002 Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey was drawn from the Valuation and Lands Agency list, the most up-to-date listing of private households in Northern Ireland. The complete list of private addresses was stratified into three regions – Belfast, East of Northern Ireland and West of Northern Ireland, and a random sample drawn from each region.

4. At each address, the interviewer lists all members of the

household eligible for inclusion in the sample, i.e. all persons aged 16 or over. The interviewer's computer then randomly selects one person from each household to complete the interview. From an eligible sample of 1,941 individuals, 1,214 interviews were achieved, giving an overall response rate of 63%.

5. Selecting only one individual for interview from each address means that individuals living in large households have a lower chance of being included in the sample than individuals living in smaller households. The data presented in this bulletin have been weighted to prevent a bias towards smaller households.

6. To assess how accurately a survey sample reflects the population of Northern Ireland, the characteristics of the sample are compared with the characteristics of the current Census of Population.

7. Statistical significance tests were carried out on a range of group differences observed in the Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey findings. These tests are used to establish the degree of confidence with which we can infer the observed findings as an accurate reflection of the views of the total Northern Ireland population.

8. For the purposes of this bulletin, the term "significant" is used only in the strict statistical sense. This means that if a comparison is reported as being significant (between the views of older and younger people for example) we are confident that there is a real difference between these groups in the sample and that the result

has not occurred by chance. The term “significant” is not used in any other sense such as “important” or “meaningful”.

9. Area analysis was based on District Council boundaries and is detailed in Table 7. Councils listed in this table were used to form each of the three areas (Belfast, East of Northern Ireland, West of Northern Ireland) described in this bulletin.

10.

**Table 7. Areas of Northern Ireland by District Council**

Area	District councils
Belfast	Belfast
East of Northern Ireland	Antrim Ards Ballymena Banbridge Carrickfergus Castlereagh Craigavon Down Larne Lisburn Newtownabbey North Down
West of Northern Ireland	Armagh Ballymoney Coleraine Cookstown Dungannon Fermanagh Limavady Derry Magherafelt Moyle Newry & Mourne Omagh Strabane

11. Due to rounding, percentages noted in figures and tables may not add to 100%.

12. The Registrar General’s classification of occupations used in this bulletin groups occupations into five socio-economic classes with the implication that occupation is a meaningful indicator of social welfare.

I Professional occupations - e.g. doctors and lawyers.

II Managerial and lower professional occupations - e.g. managers and teachers.

III<sub>n</sub> Non-manual skilled occupations - e.g. office workers.

III<sub>m</sub> Manual skilled occupations e.g. bricklayers, coalminers

IV Semi-skilled occupations - e.g. postal workers.

V Unskilled manual occupations - e.g. porters, dustmen.

For presentational purposes, in this bulletin these classifications have been grouped together as follows: I, II and III<sub>n</sub> (non-manual); III<sub>m</sub> and IV (skilled manual); V (unskilled).

*Further information and additional copies of this bulletin can be obtained by contacting Tony O’Brien on 028 9027 7603, by fax on 028 9027 7610, or by email to [tony.o'brien@rpani.gov.uk](mailto:tony.o'brien@rpani.gov.uk).*